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RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000143

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SUBJECT: ANTI-U.S. SENTIMENTS THWART OUTREACH OPPORTUNITY

CLASSIFIED BY DCM WAYNE BUSH FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: ON JANUARY 19, A PROVINCIAL UNIVERSITY ADVISED THE EMBASSY THAT IT WAS "POSTPONING" AN INVITATION TO THE AMBASSADOR TO SPEAK TO STUDENTS AND FACULTY ON JANUARY ¶23. THE UNIVERSITY'S DECISION WAS APPARENTLY IN REACTION TO PRESSURE COORDINATED BY A COALITION OF DOMESTIC NGOS. PULLING A PROFFERED INVITATION IS AN UNUSUAL AND TROUBLING DEVELOPMENT, PARTICULARLY COUNTER TO MOROCCAN CULTURAL NORMS. THIS IS ANOTHER SIGN OF THE GROWING IMPACT OF ANTI-USG ATTITUDES IN MOROCCO AND MAY ALSO REFLECT THE POWER OF ISLAMIST GROUPS ON CAMPUS. OUR SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMMING OF THE AMBASSADOR FOR A "BLITZ" OF VISITS LATER THIS MONTH TO RURAL COMMUNITIES ACROSS MOROCCO NONETHELESS INDICATES THERE IS STILL SCOPE FOR OUR OUTREACH EFFORTS. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) IN LATE NOVEMBER, THE AMBASSADOR ACCEPTED AN (UNSOLICITED) INVITATION, PROFERRED BY THE HASSAN I UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL, TO ADDRESS FACULTY AND STUDENTS. LOCATED IN THE PROVINCIAL CAPITAL OF SETTAT, ABOUT 70 KM SOUTH OF CASABLANCA, HASSAN I UNIVERSITY IS AN IDEAL VENUE FOR AMBASSADORIAL OUTREACH TO A NON-ELITE, YOUTHFUL AUDIENCE, OUTSIDE THE USUAL METROPOLES. THE SPEECH WAS SCHEDULED FOR JANUARY 23, TIMED TO MARK THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE ENTRY INTO FORCE OF THE U.S.- MOROCCO FREE TRADE AGREEMENT, AND WOULD HAVE FOCUSED IN PARTICULAR ON GROWING TRADE AND THE STRENGTH OF OVERALL BILATERAL TIES.

¶3. (SBU) IN MID-JANUARY, THE MOROCCAN ARABIC DAILIES AS-SAHIFA AND AS-SABAH PUBLISHED REPORTS THAT FACULTY MEMBERS OF HASSAN I LAW SCHOOL WERE AGITATING FOR A "BOYCOTT" OF THE AMBASSADOR'S SPEECH, TO PROTEST "UNJUST" U.S. POLICIES TOWARD THE ARAB AND ISLAMIC WORLDS. THE REPORTS CITED COORDINATION BETWEEN THE OSTENSIBLY OUTRAGED FACULTY MEMBERS AND KHALID SEFIYANI, CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL WORKING GROUP TO SUPPORT IRAQ AND PALESTINE.

¶4. (SBU) SEFIYANI HAS SERVED AS THE SPOKESMAN AND APPARENT RINGLEADER FOR A COALITION OF SIX MOROCCAN NGOS (THE MOROCCAN HUMAN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION, THE MOROCCAN PRESS UNION, THE MOROCCAN WRITERS UNION, THE UNIFIED SOCIALIST LEFTIST PARTY, THE MOROCCAN ASSOCIATION TO SUPPORT THE PALESTINIAN STRUGGLE, AND THE NATIONAL WORKING GROUP TO SUPPORT IRAQ AND PALESTINE) THAT HAVE BEEN CAMPAIGNING SINCE THE SUMMER OF 2006 FOR MOROCCAN CIVIL SOCIETY TO ABSTAIN FROM ALL CONTACT AND COOPERATION WITH THE USG. IN OCTOBER, THE COALITION ANNOUNCED THAT THEY WOULD STEP UP THEIR EFFORTS BY PUBLICLY "EXPOSING" AND "SHAMING" CIVIL SOCIETY ELEMENTS WHO COOPERATE WITH THE USG. WITH THEIR EFFORTS TO MAKE AN ISSUE OF THE AMBASSADOR'S APPEARANCE AT THE UNIVERSITY IN SETTAT, THE GROUP APPEARS TO BE MAKING GOOD ON THAT THREAT.

¶5. (SBU) ON JANUARY 19, UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS ADVISED THE EMBASSY THAT THEY WERE "POSTPONING" (INDEFINITELY) THEIR INVITATION FOR THE AMBASSADOR TO SPEAK. THEY EXPRESSED REGRET AND DISAPPOINTMENT, AND CITED AN OSTENSIBLE

"SCHEDULING CONFLICT," BUT ALSO ALLOWED THAT THEY "COULD NOT IGNORE" THE BOYCOTT CALLS.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: THIS DEVELOPMENT, VIRTUALLY UNPRECEDENTED, RUNS COUNTER TO MOROCCAN CULTURAL NORMS, AND IS INDICATIVE OF THE GROWING TRACTION THAT ANTI-AMERICAN SENTIMENTS ARE FINDING IN MOROCCO. A RANGE OF MOROCCAN CONTACTS CONFIRM THAT ANTI-U.S. VIEWS IN THE COUNTRY SPIKED WITH THE ERUPTION OF ISRAEL-HEZBOLLAH HOSTILITIES LAST SUMMER, AND AGAIN ROSE WITH THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT'S EXECUTION OF SADDAM HUSSEIN, FOR WHICH MANY ON THE MOROCCAN STREET HELD THE U.S. ACCOUNTABLE. IN SOME CASES, RELUCTANCE TO DEAL WITH THE U.S. EXTENDS TO GROUPS THAT SHOULD BE OUR NATURAL ALLIES. THE DIRECTOR OF THE MOROCCO CHAPTER OF TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL, WHO MET WITH POLCOUNS ON JANUARY 24, TOLD US HE WAS MEETING IN SPITE OF THE CHAPTER'S DECISION TO ABSTAIN FROM CONTACT WITH THE USG, AND EVEN FOREGO A POTENTIALLY SUBSTANTIAL USAID GRANT, BECAUSE OF ITS MEMBERS' OBJECTIONS TO USG POLICY.

¶7. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY'S RETRACTED INVITATION MAY ALSO REFLECT THE SIGNIFICANT AND GROWING POWER OF ISLAMIST GROUPS ON CAMPUS, WHICH TEND TO DOMINATE STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AND ALSO HAVE MANY ADHERENTS AMONG THE FACULTY. UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS HAVE FOUND THEMSELVES RELATIVELY POWERLESS SO FAR IN CHECKING THEIR RISE AND GROWING INFLUENCE OVER THE MAJORITY OF STUDENTS AND FACULTY THAT DO NOT BELONG TO THESE GROUPS.

¶8. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: THIS DEVELOPMENT WILL CERTAINLY NOT DETER THE EFFORTS OF THE AMBASSADOR OR THE EMBASSY TO REACH OUT TO THE MOROCCAN PUBLIC. INDEED, THE AMBASSADOR WILL BEGIN A NINE-DAY BLITZ OF VISITS TO RURAL COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY LATER THIS MONTH. THE FACT THAT WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GET A GOOD SCHEDULE FOR HIM AND CAN REACH OUT TO OTHERS, LIKE TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL, INDICATES THAT THERE IS STILL SCOPE FOR OUR EFFORTS. END COMMENT.

VISIT EMBASSY RABAT'S CLASSIFIED WEBSITE;
[HTTP://WWW.STATE.SGOV.GOV/P/NEA/RABAT](http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat)

RILEY